

The Gurnet - Part X

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(Written in 1935)

A new family named Wood, from Somerville, rented the front section of the farmhouse in the summer of 1909. Mr. Wood ran a grocery store on Shawmut Avenue, Boston, and his family, consisting of his wife and 3 children, enjoyed the Gurnet immensely. The elder son, Clifton, became a passionate Gurnet lover and particularly enjoyed fishing with Dr. Noyes, who had built a substantial home on the point. Ethel Wood also became a Gurnet fan, for the time being, anyway.

I went down over the fourth of July with my school friend, Frederick Campbell, and we made a trip to the Standish Monument on that day--my first visit. Fred and I went out in a dory one night about twilight, and as dusk came on my uncle, Henry Finney, became worried and shouted himself hoarse on the beach. No one, except the late Capt. Holmes himself, knew the waters off the point better than my uncle, and when he lost sight of us off the rocky shore, he was justly alarmed.

I remained several weeks that summer and had a lovely time. It was always more or less quiet during the week, but when the boats came in on Saturday afternoon, there was much bustle and excitement. The wives and sweethearts gathered on the rocks of the bay shore and eagerly scanned the waters for the boat bringing their respective lovers and husbands.

One fine day, Clifton Wood and I walked to Brant Rock and had our lunch out on the rock itself. We had to smash open a box of sardines with rocks, the resulting mixture of sardines, tin and rock proving somewhat unpalatable. In the meantime, the tide came in and left us stranded. We had to wade ashore to the great amusement of the Brant Rock girls who lined up on the beach in front of Brant Rock House.

The great event of 1909 was the establishment of a fog horn, which caused consternation and irritation among the summer residents. The existing fog bell proved inadequate. Although the people stormed and fretted every time the horn blew, they had to get used to it and gradually did.

Another event was the enlargement of the lighthouse keeper's home to its present size. More powerful lights had been installed and an assistant keeper, Mr. Francis was appointed.



Guests at the Gurnet Inn relax on the porch.

The Boardman family enjoyed the summer. Mrs. Boardman remained all through the season. On the long summer evenings, my aunt, Mrs. Finney, and I enjoyed visiting various cottages such as the *Watsons'*, the *Jacobs'* and Mrs. Holmes'. Mrs. Holmes was a cheerful hostess and loved to have a caller drop in for a little chat at any time. Day after day, she sat in the living room, enjoying the view, watching the people of the Gurnet busy with their daily chores and looking up the beach with her field glasses at each new team, wondering who on earth that was on their way to the Gurnet. Whenever a black speck appeared on the point of land 2 miles up the beach, the curiosity of the Gurnet people was instantly aroused and never flagged for a moment until the identity of the said speck was known.

The present owner of Mrs. Holmes cottage is her grandson, Austin, then a small boy on his second visit.

I returned to Boston once that year on the train with Mr. Wood. A second Gurnet visit soon followed, and my final trip home was on the steamer "Betty Alden." As I watched the Gurnet recede in the distance, it was with the same pang of emotion that I always experienced when leaving the point. Although I was not athletically inclined and did not share in many of the usual Gurnet pastimes, I did enjoy the place in my own way. The beauty of the spot--the magnificent spectacle of sea and sky, the freedom it afforded, the various types of weather encountered from clear, beautiful days to wild easterly storms with driving rain, shrieking wind and pounding surf--thrilled me to the core. I was not a lover of the water in the physical sense; I never went out in small boats as a rule, unless with competent people. Though I never learned to swim, I used to go in the water and enjoyed it in a way. Contemplation of the ocean in a romantic and philosophical manner never failed to inspire me. The grandeur of the ocean is to me one of

the most sublime creations of the Infinite--if one can forget its terrors and dangers.

Many were the visions and dreams that came to me at this beautiful spot in those youthful days, and I wonder if I did not derive as much, if not more, benefit from the Gurnet as those who enjoyed it merely in a physical way--as a place to fish, shoot, swim and sail. I know some of the finest thoughts that ever came into my consciousness came during the days spent on Gurnet Point.

In the summer of 1910, my great aunt, Miss Martha Whitehead, wanted to spend a summer at the farmhouse. She aided in fixing up the house and screened in the veranda. Consequently, my grandmother occupied the entire house.

On June 25, 1910, I arrived with my school chum, Russell Tarleton, with whom I had played on the Gurnet beach back in 1893, when we were both babies. We had just been graduated from Somerville Latin School. By a strange coincidence, Russell had moved to Somerville and, after all those intervening years, we became fast friends. We had a wonderful time together, and it was probably one of the most enjoyable weeks I ever spent there.

We used to spend much time down on the rocks around the Lover's Rock area and also walked around the point every day. Russell was an hilarious companion, and we were laughing and fooling much of the time. He used to be greatly amused at Harry Dennie. I particularly cherish this visit in memory as Russell Tarleton went South 4 years afterwards. I never saw him again, and he passed away in 1925.

It had always been one of my dreams to entertain my schoolboy friends at the Gurnet, and this outing with Russ in 1910 was the fulfillment of that dream. Twenty-five years ago, all this occurred! In summers previous, I had imagined that various friends were with me in a sort of spiritualistic, imaginative manner, but there was never any concrete evidence of their presence outside the realm of my dramatic imagination. I remember back in 1903 thinking it very strange that my aunt would not let my "best girl" come down for a visit. This individual was a certain minister's daughter named Ruth Wallace, whom I regarded in a highly sentimental manner. But I was obliged to entertain her, like all the others, wholly in fancy, though I was only 11 at the time, it was all very serious to me.

In 1911, Miss Martha Whitehead again spent the summer with my grandmother. I was working in Boston that summer but spent the last 2 weeks of August with them. Down at my favorite retreat near Lover's Rock on pleasant afternoons, while gazing at the blue waters of the ocean and the waves dashing upon the rocks, I composed a set of waltzes which I

called "Valse Gurnet."

The summer of 1912 was the last active summer which we spent at the Gurnet. It was a busy season, and we had a lively time. It was my last long visit at the beloved spot.

The Wood family again occupied the front of the farmhouse while we occupied the rear portion, as in 1909. Clifton Wood was still wildly enthusiastic over the place. We had shows, dances and other entertainment. I particularly remember a dramatized version of "Jack and the Beanstalk" given in the Pavilion. Adele Howe, Leslie Barnes, Robert Gifford and myself were leading players.

One lovely day, my aunt, Mrs. Finney, harnessed up the horse, and we drove to Brant Rock and Ocean Bluff. We continued on to a beautiful spot named Rexhame Terrace in Marshfield, where we picked some berries on the estate of Mrs. Sherrill after getting her permission.

In these last summers, Mrs. Boardman would sit out on the veranda wrapped in her shawls, night after night, meditating, reminiscing, gazing at the lights of Plymouth. The nights grew cold as autumn approached, and the lights on the Plymouth shore seemed very near in the clear atmosphere of September. How she loved the Gurnet! She always said it was her only home and stayed until the cold wind of late September drove her back to the city. She would often repeat long passages of Scriptures, learned in her girlhood. My grandmother was a very religious woman and a great influence in shaping my religious ideals.